DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 353 072 PS 021 045

TITLE Beyond Tinkering: Transformation. A Community Plan for Helping All Children Learn.
INSTITUTION Maine Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Augusta.
PUB DATE Sep 92
NOTE 30p.
AVAILABLE FROM Maine Association for Curriculum Development, P.O. Box 45, Bowdoinham, ME 04008 ($4).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Action; *Community Involvement; Community Planning; Early Childhood Education; *Educational Improvement; Informal Assessment; *Learning Readiness; Public Policy; *School Readiness; State Programs; Young Children
IDENTIFIERS America 2000; *Maine; *National Education Goals 1990

ABSTRACT

This booklet is designed to help people in Maine communities organize on a local level to address one of the main goals of the America 2000 program, that all children will start school ready to learn. The booklet suggests that this goal is more complicated than it first appears and that its meaning can vary, depending upon the perspective from which it is viewed. Meeting this complex and important goal will require more than a master plan developed by a few community leaders and government officials. Members of local communities who care about children must come together to identify the problems of and the possibilities for helping children succeed in school. An appendix outlines ideas for organizing community groups, including: (1) ways for group members to get acquainted, set goals, and examine beliefs; (2) suggestions to stimulate discussion, such as storytelling and the sharing of interpretations; (3) the use of systems metaphors, such as the metaphor of a garden to visually assess how past, current, and future programs have budded, flowered, and withered; (4) the use of storyboards to examine and work with forces that support or obstruct specific goals; and (5) ways to evaluate the success of the group. (Contains 21 references.) (MDM)

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BEYOND TINKERING: TRANSFORMATION

A Community Plan for Helping All Children Learn

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MAINE ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION
& CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
SEPTEMBER, 1992

The Maine Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

The Maine Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (MASCD), whose members are administrators, teachers, and supporters of education in Maine schools K-12, recently established a goal to influence the direction of education within the state. In order to meet that goal, the executive board authorized a committee to examine one of the America 2000 goals with the idea that this group would produce a policy analysis for publication and distribution. Although this document differs from a traditional policy analysis in many respects, it is intended to serve the same purpose, (i.e., to serve as a guide for a community wishing to take action toward solving a complex social and educational problem).

INVITATION

To turn our public schools around we need to adopt that legendary Noah Principle: No more prizes for predicting rain. Prizes only for building arks.

- Louis V. Gerstner

Dear Person Who Cares About Children,

When Louis V. Gerstner made this statement, he was stressing the need for business people to become involved in education. What Mr. Gerstner believes about involving businesses in education is also true for the other members of a community.

In the following pages you will find the MASCD response to the America 2000 goal, "By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn." As a committee we discovered that the goal is more complicated than it first appears and that its meaning can vary, depending upon the perspective from which it is viewed. We came to believe that meeting this complex and important goal will require more than a master plan developed by a few community leaders and government officials. Instead, many people must care enough about children to get involved: *It takes the whole village to raise a child.* In this document we outline a process which can be used in any community to develop new and better ways of solving old problems.

The process we suggest begins with a community conversation in which diverse members of the community—parents and other citizens including educators and social workers—are invited to discuss the goal and share their differing perspectives. As these conversations continue, people will begin to see many ways they can act, both individually and collectively, to address the needs of children in order to help them all do well in school. If each participant leaves each conversation with a firm commitment to do something, however small, to help some child before the next meeting, the potential for reaching the goal is great. Even if community members also agree to take some larger action as a group, individual efforts are also necessary for solving this difficult and complex problem. Because those who take the initiative to begin a community dialogue on the America 2000 goal may need help in planning, this document suggests specific activities and includes a bibliography so that relevant resources can be quickly obtained. Since this document is designed to help a community create a context for problem solving, the process described here may also be useful for other issues.

When community members come together to discuss this goal, decide upon actions they should take, and then determine how to proceed to better meet the needs of the children in that community, participants will become more of a community. Through discussion, individuals with personal ideas and concerns will become aware of the common values and goals they share. Conversation and commitment coupled with action will lead to change. Each and every town has within its grasp the power to design, build, and sail its own ark.

Sincerely,
MASCD Policy Analysis Committee

MASCD Policy Analysis Group

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BEYOND TINKERING: TRANSFORMATION

A Community Plan for Helping All Children Learn

September, 1992

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THE JOURNEY AND THE CONVERSATION: UNRAVELING COMPLEXITY

A good conversation is neither a fight nor a contest. Circular in form, cooperative in manner, and constructive in intent, it is an interchange of ideas by those who see themselves not as adversaries but as human beings come together to talk and listen and learn from one another.

- Jane Roland Martin
Reclaiming a Conversation

The committee charged with studying the question derived from one of the America 2000 goals, *What would it take to have all Maine children arrive at school ready to learn?,* is a diverse group of people: principals of elementary, middle, and high schools; state department consultants; a director of gifted/talented education and professional development in a local school district; and a college teacher, who was formerly a public school teacher and principal. We first approached the task of doing a policy analysis on this goal in a very traditional way. We looked at examples done by other ASCD affiliates, reviewed theoretical frameworks for conducting policy analyses, and assumed that we would take a similar approach.

However, we soon found that there were several good reasons for doing something different. First, we discovered that other national and state groups with much greater financial and human resources had already published policy analyses on the same goal. It would be a waste of time for us to try to reinvent the wheel, especially since our resources were very limited. Even though we couldn't begin to compete with the work of these groups which was much more extensive than we could produce, our final document could refer interested readers to these previously published studies.

Second, we felt it was important to develop a "user-friendly" document that would be of practical use to people in communities throughout the state. We didn't want to publish something that would collect dust on a shelf or be stuffed into an already-cluttered file cabinet.

But most important, we discovered through our discussion about the goal that a traditional policy analysis would reinforce the idea that complex social and educational problems can be solved simply by developing a master plan with clearly established goals and objectives. We have been involved in education long enough to see countless examples of the failure of plans developed by people who believe the solution for any problem — even a very complex human/social one — lies in developing and funding new and better programs. Moreover, this goal, developed at a conference of governors which did not include any teachers and parents, was similar to many other goals and programs in that they have been planned by people who do not know either the children or the local communities they are intended to serve.

We were also very concerned with the implication in the wording of the goal that some children were somehow deficient when they came to school and needed to be "fixed" so that they could learn. We believe that if people adopt a new way of thinking about educational problems, they might also see ways the school can change to be ready for children.

The more we talked, the more we realized that the simplicity of the goal statement was deceptive. We began to see, for example, that it could mean many things to many different people. Yet discussion of the many questions and issues raised by the goal statement rarely takes place. We considered that there might be alternative, informal ways people in a given community might work, individually and collectively, to seek solutions to very difficult and complex problems. In fact, these alternative ways might in the end achieve more success than formal programs which have not worked in the past. If many people were involved, each person doing a little would be significant.

Finally, we were struck by the benefits of the process we ourselves were engaged in. In discussing the goal, we began to think about new ways old problems might be solved. The conversation was personally

stimulating — and something people too rarely take time to do — but it also led us to a consensus on a new approach we could take to complete the task we were given. We could think of nothing that might be more beneficial in a community trying to solve any educational problem than for its people to engage in conversations similar to the ones we had. Conversation may be the best way for everyone to understand a goal in the context of the local community, a necessary first step for its realization.

Because conversation can build community, conversations among people who care about children may be the best way to discover new ways to give our children a better future. Despite the fact that people have multiple perceptions and multiple realities, they can, by joining together in multiple ways, produce multiple outcomes. Our hope is that, by participating in community conversations, people will begin to see the limits of formal master plans and will be moved to take some risks to break new ground.

Music provides an example to show why the Education 2000 goal is not likely to work unless we change our way of thinking about it. Designing a master plan and expecting it to work in every community is like commissioning the writing of a complicated symphonic score to be played everywhere in the same way. Communities have very different resources — their musicians may have different levels of training or talent to play the music as written. Some may be attempting to perform the orchestral score with cardboard instruments. If one thinks instead of a jazz improvisation or folk music as a metaphor for addressing this goal, then one sees that many can contribute in diverse ways with whatever resources they have. Improvisational music emerges from the group gathered together and engaged in a collaborative activity. With no score to follow, each community will create its own music. Encouraged by their own success — rather than discouraged by having to play someone else's music badly — people are likely to want to go on playing.

Thus, instead of a formal master plan with a step-by-step outline for addressing this goal, we offer here some suggestions to help local communities create a context in which people can come together and "improvise" a process for finding solutions to any problem. Because the problems of the human condition are not solved with money and programs but by human involvement, the process we suggest begins with conversation; but it ends with each party to the conversation making a commitment to follow through with specific action to do something, however small, to address the problem in the local community.

I look at the individual. I can love only one person at a time. I can feed only one person at a time. So you begin. If I didn't pick up one person, I wouldn't have picked up 42,000.

- Mother Teresa

FROM FIFTEEN WORDS COME MANY MEANINGS

What would it take to have all Maine children arrive at school ready to learn?

The fifteen words in the question—none longer than two syllables—appear easy to understand. However, these words hold values and assumptions which shape our response to the question. The committee discussed alternative ways of understanding each of these terms.

This question appears to have a simple answer. This country says it believes in and is committed to the success of all children regardless of their conditions or circumstances. Clearly, unless children are nourished and nurtured well in their earliest years, they will not develop the capacity or dispositions necessary for later learning. Quality health care, sound nutrition, a safe and supportive home and community, and exciting educational experiences all contribute to children's development. We've known these conditions of success for twenty-five years. Without recognizing and acting on them, we may be dooming another generation of youngsters to illness and despair.

Simple answers are easy and inviting, but the current situation in both public education and human services is proof that real solutions are elusive. We need to look beyond the simple answers and consider complex issues such as roles, responsibilities, and values to discover the path to assuring the best educational experiences for each child. The map of this complex path is contained inside the question itself. Let's examine the common meanings of each term used and contrast these meanings with broader, more helpful, definitions.

ALL MAINE CHILDREN. At first glance all Maine children sounds like a single easily understood group. Children, however, have different characteristics and needs. They bring with them different backgrounds and experiences. Children entering school for the first time range in age from three to seven. Some suffer from mental or physical handicap; speech, hearing, or vision impairment; or a learning disability. They have different intellectual strengths, needs, and interests. Some live in rural Maine; others, in the center of a city. Many children experience a loving consistent family climate; others are victims of psychological abuse or physical violence. Some children already have had many outside opportunities: dance lessons, swim lessons, trips to museums and concerts, and foreign travel. Other children have stayed close to home glued to the TV. Some have parents who are highly educated and value quality education, but others have parents who found their own schooling unpleasant and unhelpful. Because some children come from homes or communities that do not share the dominant white middle-class culture, they learn behaviors and values at home which conflict with the expectations of the school. As these few examples illustrate, the most comprehensive answer to this question may be that every child who comes to school is unique.

ARRIVE. The very idea of arriving suggests that we expect the child to take a trip that ends in a specific destination — school. In Maine, most of these students have had five years to finish this trip. The day after Labor Day they arrive at school. Is this the end of the trip, the beginning of a new and different trip, or just a milepost on a longer journey? What's magical about the day after Labor Day in the year the child turns five? Does this fixed date help or hinder children's success? Should we expect children to arrive each day ready for school, or only on the first day? If it's important for young children to arrive ready to learn, should we expect the same of all students beginning in kindergarten and lasting through high school?

SCHOOL. The word school comes from the French and Greek words schola and scol, meaning a body of scholars and teachers pursuing knowledge. We sometimes speak of a school as a community of learners. Because a community's purpose is to work toward a common goal, members who choose to opt out or go it alone are usually ill-equipped and no longer have the group's support. Public schools are also political institutions, formed by towns to educate, socialize and prepare children at the public's expense. As institutions, schools focus on providing the greatest good for the greatest number, trying

to operate efficiently enough and with enough success that taxpayers will continue to support the school's operation. We must think of school as more than a building where children spend a few hours a day.

READY TO LEARN. The idea of readiness is layered with meaning. Behavioral scientists once saw this as an identifiable moment in time when a child would be able to understand the specific skill to be taught. Learning was understood as the acquisition of a sequential series of incremental skills and discrete bits of information that could be neatly ordered. More recent research has changed the meaning of readiness. We now know that each child, from the moment of birth, is learning something every day. The instinct to learn is as elemental to the human species as the instincts for sucking and snuggling. The work of children is now seen as making sense of their world. Children learn by interacting with real people, materials and ideas, and comparing learnings with prior knowledge. The role of the adult becomes that of supporter, of challenger, of facilitator, as well as transmitter of facts, information and skills.

LEARN. Children are constantly learning. They learn in different ways and at different rates. They learn in the "outside world" as well as in the formal world of schools. They learn from parents and peers as well as from television and popular culture. They learn some things we want them to know and some things we would rather they didn't know.

There are many goals for learning, but they all cluster around the idea of children reaching their potential in the areas of job skills, community participation, and cognitive and personal growth. There are many different ways to learn, and recent research suggests that there are also many different kinds of intelligence. Our society nurtures and reinforces some kinds of intelligence more than others. We also now know a great deal about factors which affect learning: health and nutrition, self-esteem, early language experiences, motivation, reinforcement, multimodal learning experiences, the need for relevance and personal meaning, and the impact of traditional school practices such as tracking and retention.

Examination of these terms raises many issues. Children learn from their daily interactions with the world. Too often schools respond to children as if their daily interactions with the world are the same when, in fact, there is great diversity. When school learning builds on white middle-class mainstream experiences, children from diverse social, economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds feel devalued and often are set up to fail. If we assume, as the wording of our question does, that the only "real learning" is that which takes place in school, we discount the richness and complexity of what children learn in their earliest years. Walking, talking, self-care, and many of the milestones children experience before they come to school demonstrate the power of the human need and ability to learn and make sense of the world.

What would happen if we assume that when children begin school, each individual child is right where he/she should be and the question were rephrased to ask: **What would it take to have all Maine schools ready to support all children in their learning?** Rephrasing the question invites us to view the problem in a different way.

ONE GOAL. . .MANY PERSPECTIVES

This committee asked several groups of people to respond to this question: **What would it take to have all Maine children arrive at school ready to learn?** Respondents came from a variety of backgrounds: college students, parents, social service workers, teachers, and administrators. Some people chose to write an interpretation of the question:

> *The question suggests that we should look for ways to change the students and not the system. How can we prepare kids to fit school rather than the converse?*
>
> *Does it mean the child was ready to learn at 8:00 AM when school began — as opposed to maybe 10:00 AM when they are more alert?*
>
> *Do the children in Maine have the motivation and desire to learn in general — regardless of the time of day?*
>
> *Ready to learn? — All children are ready to learn! They are learning every day, all the time! Perhaps we mean 'ready to learn' in ways that schools are prepared (or willing) to teach. What does that say about schools?*
>
> *By asking the question, the author assumes that currently students in Maine are not arriving at school ready to learn. The author is searching for suggestions for necessary improvement in all aspects of the school system.*
>
> *What does this question mean? How do we prepare entering school children for the challenge of education, or how do we prepare each student for each school day?*

Other people wrote answers to the question:

> *A safe place to live*
> *Plenty of food*
> *Intact psyche*
> *Full employment for all parents*
> *Parent education so more parents feel comfortable "teaching"*
> *Reduced TV/Nintendo usage*
> *Being greeted in a positive manner by their bus driver. . .the person who begins and ends their school day*
> *Love and care first of all. A child should know his ABC's, tie his shoes, count to ten and know how to dress himself before coming to school.*
> *A good night's sleep*
> *Effective communication between school and parents of very young children*
> *A minimum amount of time on a school bus*
> *The citizens of Maine must elect and/or select leaders who place children's issues at the top of their list of priorities*
> *Decent home life*
> *More than verbal pandering from Bush and McKernan — back it up with financial support in areas of pre-natal care, nutrition, day care, family support, preschool programs*

These examples of the many ways people responded to the question not only show how complex it is but also raise questions about the effectiveness of any master plan to achieve the goal. Built into the working of the goal are the seeds of its own destruction because it suggests that with the right design

and enough money, the problem can be solved. If people interpret the problem in so many ways, there is no one way to design any plan to achieve a solution. In fact, very different plans could be developed for each interpretation. The real danger in writing any master plan is that people can fool themselves into thinking the plan itself is the solution. Too frequently people believe that the work is done when the plan is written or that the work to be done will be done by someone else. This allows people to take no personal responsibility for solving the problem.

Our discussions of all these issues led us to the realization that to state and solve the problem, community members must first share their perspectives. A metaphor may help in understanding why community conversation is a necessary first step. As participants begin to develop a common vision, they will also generate creative ways to tackle this complex problem.

The differences between a formal dinner and a pot-luck supper are similar to the differences between a formal master plan and the informal process we suggest as a better approach to addressing this problem.

You're invited to a formal dinner. It's strictly "black-tie". The food is wonderfully prepared by a skilled chef but place-cards tell you where to sit, each course is carefully served by a very formal waiter, and there seem to be too many forks and spoons. It's "adults only"—no children allowed.

The next week you're invited to a neighborhood pot-luck supper. You and your friends have fun deciding what you'll each bring. Every cook wants to bring his or her specialty dish. People come together with a mix of food and drink. The whole family is welcome. People arrive and start talking and enjoying each other's company right away. There's not enough room in the dining room so some people head for the living room or the patio.

Both of these dinner experiences give you a chance to share the company of interesting people and to have a good meal. But the feelings associated with each setting—and, perhaps, the comfort of the people involved — vary from one to the other. While the formal setting may have expertly prepared food on a single theme, the coming together of neighbors with pot-luck dishes — and ideas and experiences about children and schools — may provide a rich opportunity for a sense of community to develop.

Which dinner invitation would you prefer? Which do you think others would choose? Our hope in the suggestions which follow is that people in local communities will not only take part in discussing the problems of children and schools but also become part of their solutions. From sharing in a community conversation will come a continuing commitment to personal action.

THE PROCESS: WEAVING A COMMUNITY PLAN

We believe that ordinary people can achieve extraordinary results in solving local problems. Our premise is that community members can use a process to improve the present and future of the children in their own schools, towns, and districts. In contrast, policy decisions such as national education goals, especially unfunded ones, often are little more than a wish for a desirable state of affairs; our current situation shows that such efforts have not worked in the past.

Today's problems come from yesterday's "solutions."

- Peter M. Senge
The Fifth Discipline

WHAT IS THIS PROCESS?

This process consists of community people who care about children coming together to identify the problems of and possibilities for helping all children succeed in school. The ultimate goal is for people who care about children to become personally involved in the lives and education of children in their own community. This approach reflects the need to transcend traditional problem solving and is locally based. Knowledge and caring provide the foundation for creative thinking. Wisdom and commitment will emerge. The power of the process comes from ordinary people sharing their concepts of the issue, clarifying ways to improve the situation, and making a commitment to take specific action.

WHY IS THIS PROCESS LIKELY TO WORK?

Given the economic need for a more effectively educated citizenry as well as the vast differences in the home circumstances of young children in any community, schools and communities are facing new social and educational problems. If higher standards and more requirements were the answers, these problems would already be dim memories. However, problems are rarely eliminated through legislation and programs alone. If such problems are going to yield to solution, human involvement, collaboration, creativity, and commitment will be required.

Looking in a new way at an ordinary question can be an adventure.

If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.

- George Eliot
Middlemarch

The problems of schools failing children and children failing in school is as old as our not hearing the squirrel's heartbeat. Community members must find new ways to tap and nurture the potential of each child who is failing in school. To do this, the problem must be conceived in new and different ways. New answers must be generated. People not previously offering their ideas, time, and talents must join in the community's mission to help children. Resources must be used in new and different ways.

In what better way can these solutions be found than by community members challenging their own ideas about what the problems are and collaborating in new ways to solve old problems?

WHO SHOULD TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR STARTING AND MAINTAINING THE PROCESS?

Anyone in the community can initiate, lead, and nurture this process. An individual or a group of people, educators or noneducators, can be equally effective. However, the initiators must believe that the whole community has a responsibility to consider the well-being and learning of children.

The first step is to issue a community call asking for interested people to join in the discussion. The request may be stated simply: "WANTED. . .people who are willing to discuss how we as community

members can better support the nurturing, success, and education of our children." Arrangements for a meeting place and time have to be made, and there has to be some plan to acquaint participants with one another, stimulate discussion, and help move people to commitment and action. Each community's plan is likely to differ because of its own unique problems and its own history of community-school-child advocacy and support.

WHO SHOULD BE INVITED?

The meetings should be open to anyone in the community who cares about the future of children. A diverse group will probably have livelier and more thought-provoking discussions than one with similar values and experiences. Diverse opinions and ideas may also result in more creative and varied questions, answers, and solutions.

However, an already existing group of some kind may choose to use this challenge as a service project. Certainly, this issue is multifaceted enough and has proven itself resistant enough to easy answers to warrant any interested group devoting time and energy to finding solutions.

WHAT WILL THE GROUP DO WHEN IT MEETS?

The process can be outlined in simple terms:

1. Invite people who care about children to come together.
2. Engage in extended conversations about the problem and possible solutions in the context of the local community.
3. Make a commitment to follow through with specific individual and collective action to contribute to the solution.

The activities described in the Appendix are designed to help group members get acquainted, to establish a sense of community, to encourage reflection and sharing of ideas, and to generate ideas for solutions for local problems.

Depending on community conversations and multiple efforts to meet this Education 2000 goal constitutes a paradigm shift. The process we suggest contrasts sharply with the carefully developed master plan, stated objectives, timeline, and a seemingly orderly progression from goal statement to its eventual attainment. Doris Ray has warned that "A paradigm shift is not simple, and it follows no quick recipe." Because people must "literally re-invent themselves" as they enter unexplored territory, this kind of change can feel "uncomfortable" and "messy." Participants in this process then should anticipate feelings of discomfort as they work together to create a new synergism of thought and action and recognize that solving the problem will take time. They have to believe that in the chaos and contradictions of their struggle to find new meanings, they will find new solutions to old problems.

Framework for the Process:

- Involve key people.
- Establish rapport and a climate of trust.
- Identify common beliefs and guiding values.
- Create a shared language.
- Clarify interpretation of the question or of the issue.
- Create a vision or a goal.
- Identify potential obstacles.
- Develop multiple strategies for action.
- Work individually as well as collectively.
- Build the capacity to continue by getting constant feedback.
- Use feedback to make adjustments.
- Take small steps.
- Record accomplishments.
- Celebrate successes.

The following general guidelines for facilitating meetings should be helpful:

1. Get people involved right away and make them feel comfortable by using ice-breakers if members don't already know each other. (See Appendix for suggestions.)
2. Keep the structure for all meetings simple and flexible, but make sure everyone who attends is a participant in the conversation.
3. End each meeting by having participants write down and share one specific action they will take before the next meeting, which may be as small as donating clothing to a needy child in the neighborhood school or purchasing a book for a kindergarten child from a poor family or as ambitious as exploring the possibility of becoming a foster parent.
4. Collect feedback from participants at each meeting by asking them to complete a simple form or do a free writing. (See Appendix - "Group Caretaking.")
5. Enrich the discussions and help participants broaden their knowledge by giving them articles which describe successful practices in their communities or help them understand new teaching approaches. (See Bibliography.)
6. Begin every meeting (after the first one) by asking participants to say (perhaps in small groups) what they have done and perhaps also what they have learned since the last meeting.
7. Provide time for reporting on the results of small group discussions to the larger group.
8. Keep some kind of record of individual and collective efforts so that people can see what they are accomplishing.

The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and if they can't find them, they make them.

- George Bernard Shaw

We believe that ordinary people have the ability to make the circumstances that will enable the children in their own communities to flourish. The necessary changes cannot be mandated; they must be discovered and created in the context of the community and the local resources. Only through human action will any complex human and social problem be solved. It takes the whole village to raise a child; and, if we raise our children well, we will have created a better future for them, for their children, and for ourselves.

APPENDIX

The material in this appendix is designed for facilitators to use with groups. Facilitators may find some of these activities appropriate for their groups, or they may wish to use other activities and strategies with which they are familiar. Please feel free to photocopy these pages.

GETTING ACQUAINTED

- Form pairs. Interview each other (reason for being at meeting, one personal item, etc.). Introduce each other.

- **GOAL SETTING**
  Write one expectation and one thing you want to learn from the meeting. Share information in groups of three and consolidate ideas; each group then shares ideas with the whole group. In the whole group record expectations and desired topics for learning on chart paper. Identify commonalities; turn commonalities into goals; and then set them in priority order.

- **EXAMINING BELIEFS**
  Beliefs drive behavior; however, we often cannot articulate what we believe. Looking at the beliefs of others can frequently bring our own beliefs into sharper focus.

  For this activity, each corner of the room is labeled as STRONGLY AGREE, AGREE, STRONGLY DISAGREE, and DISAGREE. Statements are read and shown on an overhead projector. For each statement move to the corner which describes your position on the issue and explain your reason for choosing that corner to the others who made the same choice. Each group selects a reporter who then explains the reasons for the choice to the group opposite it. The purpose is not to debate positions; it is simply to understand more fully positions other than your own.

  Some provocative statements which may be used follow:

1. "School crisis is a reflection of this greater social crisis."
2. "It is absurd and anti-life to be part of a system that compels you to sit in confinement with people of exactly the same age and social class. That system effectively cuts you off from the immense diversity of life and the synergy of variety."
3. "Children. . .are indifferent to the adult world."
4. "Children. . .have almost no curiosity, and what little they do have is transitory; they cannot concentrate for very long even on things they choose to do."
5. "Children. . .have a poor sense of the future, of how tomorrow is inextricably linked to today."

Reference:

Arbuckle, Margaret A., and Murray, Lynn B. (1989). Building better systems for professional growth, an action guide. Andover, Massachusetts: The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands.

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STORYTELLING AS REFLECTION ON PERSONAL BELIEFS

Another way to help people get in touch with their personal beliefs, feelings, and intellect is through storytelling. Following is a suggested process for this.

1. Read the following quote:

   . . .our lives are made of stories. Such stories allow us to explore our lives, to try out alternative possible ways of acting and being in the world, and. . .to help us shape our future actions. (Kazemek, 1985, p. 201, in Jalongo)
2. What we want to see happen for children is based on our fundamental beliefs about education, learning, and growing up. Whether or not we work together to achieve what we say we want depends to a great extent on how well we understand the beliefs we each hold. One way to get to the heart of what we believe is to think about experiences we have had with teaching, learning, and growing up. The experiences we remember are the ones which seem to reveal something that we really believe.

   Think of something that happened in your life which illustrates a belief you have about education, learning, or growing up. Share that story with your group, and then identify the belief. Here is an example:

   When I was in second grade, my teacher was Miss Rose, who I thought was the oldest woman in the world. She was tall, with a forbidding face framed by steel-gray hair secured tightly in a severe bun. Gray shirtwaists which fell nearly to the floor composed her wardrobe. The wire-rimmed glasses she wore exaggerated her eyes, making them appear distorted and inaccessible. I felt very small and incompetent next to her, and very afraid.

   Miss Rose must have in some way sensed my fear and feelings of ineptitude, because she did something very subtle yet profound to change those feelings. In those days we had "banking" in school, where we each brought in a dime a week and put it into the class account. In her infinite wisdom, Miss Rose put me in charge of the bankbook, making me the "banker" for our class. At first I was terrified - weak, little, fearful, incompetent me couldn't do this! Yet over time, I learned to collect the dimes, keep the records, tally the rows, and count the funds. I became more self-assured and confident, growing in her silent trust of my abilities.

   The belief about learning that this instilled in me is that, if we provide children with real tasks, trust them with authentic work, and believe that they can learn to accomplish them successfully, the children will forever after see themselves as competent learners, capable of tackling complex, diverse, and difficult assignments with ease and success.
3. In groups of three or four, share personal stories and the beliefs they illustrate. A recorder in each group should write down the beliefs which storytellers relate.
4. Make a big list of beliefs for the whole group.

Thanks to Heidi McGinley, Maine Department of Education, for permission to use the training design from which this was adapted.

Reference:

Jalongo, Mary Renck. (1992, April). Teachers' stories: Our ways of knowing. Educational Leadership, p. 68-73.

SHARING INTERPRETATIONS

- Individually reflect on the question "What would it take to have all Maine children arrive at school ready to learn?" Then write your interpretation of this question. Next work with a partner to consolidate your thoughts into one interpretation of the question. Then combine two pairs to form a group of four; again consolidate ideas to form a new interpretation. Continue this process until one interpretation is created. (Adapt as needed for the size of the group.)

  An alternate plan: try answering rather than interpreting the question and then follow the same process.

CREATING A VISION

- Establishing a shared vision can become a touchstone which guides subsequent planning and action. The first step is to form a picture in your "mind's eye" of what it would look like for students to come to school ready to learn. Second, write or draw three or four things that are happening in that mental picture. Then in small groups, make a group chart of the ideas that are shared. Reach consensus on three or four ideas. In the large group, chart each small group's response and look for commonalities — shared ideas of what the ideal situation might look like. These ideas comprise the shared vision of the group. If they are visible at each meeting, they can be used to guide the actions needed to make the vision a reality.

  Thanks to Corda Ladd, Benton Elementary School, for permission to use the shared visioning design which was adapted from activities in Building Better Systems.

Reference:
Arbuckle, Margaret A., and Murray, Lynn B. (1989). Building better systems for professional growth, an action guide. Andover, Massachusetts: The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands.

THE GARDENER

- The "Gardener" is an activity a group can do to assess current efforts. The goal of this analogy is to visualize what is happening "around" the issue and to define what is and is not working. This activity gives the group an opportunity to tell its story and to legitimize what has already been done. If acknowledging and honoring past efforts do not occur, stakeholders and action people of the past will feel usurped by the new effort. The intention is to touch everyone and channel all energy, both old and new, toward this new goal. Specifics for using this metaphor along with a graphic of the handout appear on the following pages. The directions, written for a faculty group, will need modifications for this purpose.

Reference:
Bailey, Suzanne. (1992, April 1-3). Staff developers as internal change agents. ASCD Pre-Conference.

Using Systems Metaphors to Assess the Whole System

One of the readiness activities that a site team can do is to assess what programs are currently in progress. Using a metaphor that deals naturally with cycles - such as the "Gardener" here - tends to put into focus how programs END. In using this with schools, it's possible to inventory all of the curriculum and instruction efforts going on at a site so that ALL of the innovations are SEEN at once.

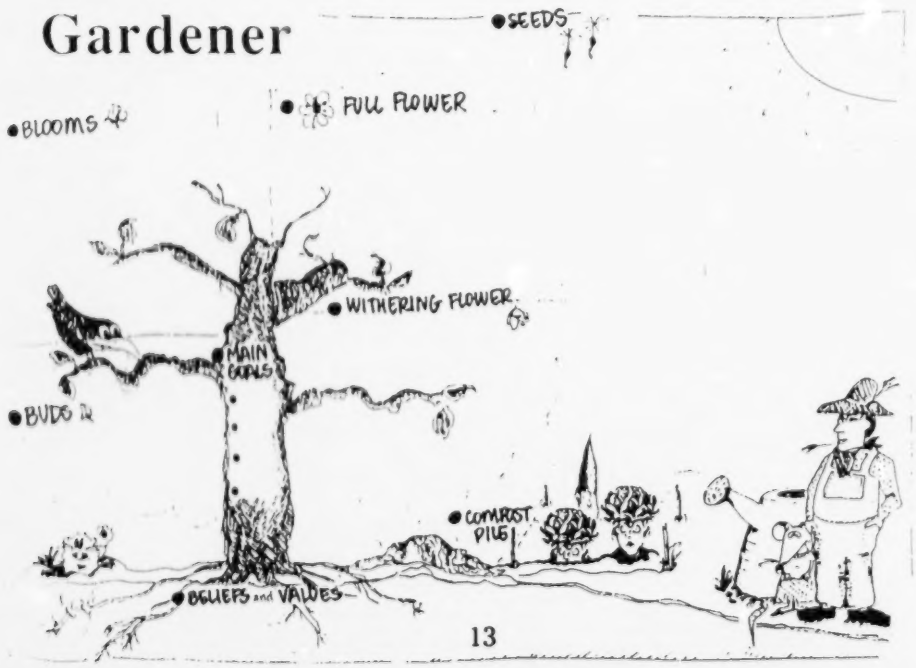
Using a large sheet of butcher paper and large post-its or colored index cards with tape, each program is written on a post-it and placed on the tree depending on where it is in the cycle.

- Seeds = Ideas or mandates on the horizon blowing in from outside (State, Federal, Community. . .) that haven't landed yet, but are waiting to come in soon.
- Buds = New programs just starting this year usually needing lots of attention, training, energy & funds
- Blooms = Programs that have been in place and have been adopted by some staff, still needing attention
- Full flower = Those programs that are now in full implementation and in the behavior of staff with results beginning to show, support is still offered but most training is over, modifications are appearing as staff personalizes program to fit needs of students
- Withering flower = Programs that are automated into the behavior of staff (second nature) needing no attention or funding and are about to fall off the tree to make space for better ideas
- Compost pile = Previous programs no longer implemented but built skills as an "on ramp" to new ideas . . .they have been all but forgotten, but they nourish the roots of the tree
- Garbage Can = Some groups like to draw in a garbage can for those programs that haven't created results or for whom funding ran out, etc. etc.

This inventorying process can be done as a staff or by grade level or departments and shared with the whole staff. It can usually be done in a 2-3 hour meeting. Trees will often be covered with post-its, but there will usually be patterns-parts of the tree that are fuller or emptier.

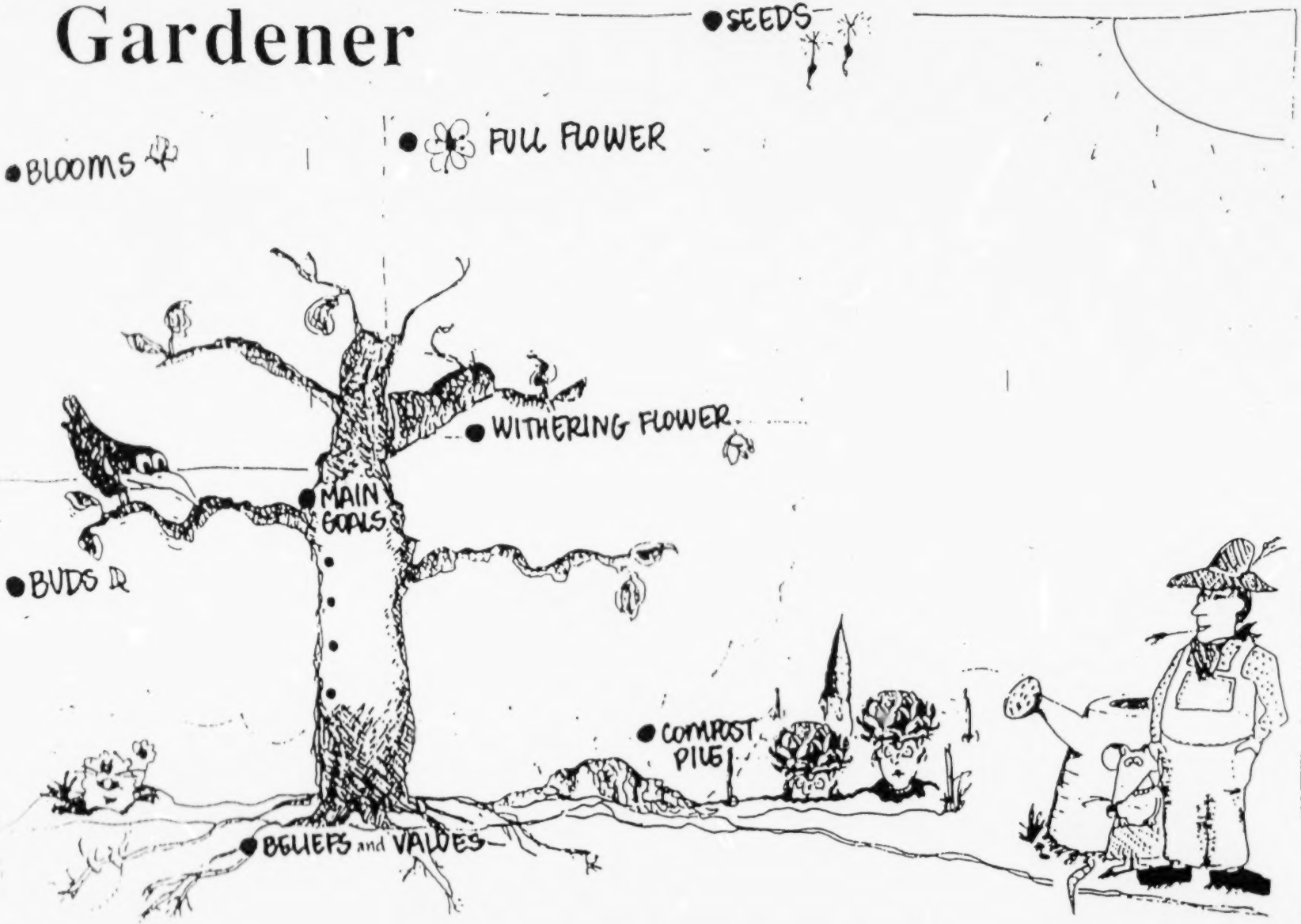
The real value is the dialogue about the patterns. What causes the patterns? What are the "pests" (gopher on lower left) that eat away at the tree? What's the "energy" (the sun) that keeps the tree energized and growing? What beliefs and values about people and learning serve as "roots" for the tree?

AFTER the site defines the preferred future (VISION) for the restructuring process, you can revisit the tree(s) and write in the main goals of the restructure on the trunk of the tree. Then you can EVALUATE existing programs (post-it by post-it) in their current ability to reach the Vision. Decisions will need to be made about programs that need to be cycled off the tree (not relevant or producing results toward the Vision) and those that will be added. This is an ongoing process.



(from S. Bailey)

Gardener



(from S. Bailey)

STORYBOARDS

This activity, a follow-up to "The Gardener" activity, is a concise way to examine and work with forces that support and obstruct doing something about a goal. First, list the forces that support and obstruct the growth of the garden. Then follow the sequence and timing below:

3 minutes

Create groups of five and work out roles for each of the members — timekeeper, airspace controller (one who monitors the amount of time individual members of the group talk so that everyone gets an opportunity to speak), facilitator, recorder, and spokesperson.

5 minutes

Identify two or three successes that the group would like to achieve in the next three months. From the list of supports and obstacles that has been provided, think of building on those things that are supportive and minimizing those things that appear to be obstacles. For example, a group might build on the support it has from the number of volunteers and the intensity of interest in education in the community and minimize the absence of money by having everyone who volunteers or expresses interest in this goal make a personal commitment to do something for a child in school. Examine these successes with regard to which ones are do-able, which might be most timely, and which would have most impact. Select one item to work on and create a storyboard.

4 minutes

Brainstorm ten ideas for potential next steps to make the success happen. Do a cluster map and keep the data loose so that the steps can be moved around. Test ideas by asking again what is do-able, what is timely, what the group has energy to do, and then proceed to move the steps into a sequence.

10 minutes

Discuss the positive and negative aspects of each idea, adapting, collapsing, and prioritizing them.

8 minutes

Select a sequence for the ideas and using "post-its" or paper develop a storyboard of the actions and the steps that will achieve success.

8 minutes

Prepare a two-minute presentation. The benefit of this activity is to generate many actions in one session and allow for a lot of discussion. The final presentation may also serve as a medium for embellishing actions that have just been created.

The situation is a forced one and strict attention needs to be paid to the timing. The scheduled time for this activity is thirty-eight minutes.

Thank you to Suzanne Bailey, Bailey and Associates, 778 Brookside Drive, Vacaville, California 95688 for permission to use the forcefield analysis design from which this activity was adapted.

GROUP CARETAKING

If the process is to be effective, participants must listen to what other people have to say. Getting feedback is important so that the group can make adjustments. No one person is responsible for the success or failure of a process. The group needs to be its own steward. Time to debrief the meeting is important. Addressing some or all of these questions will probably enhance the group:

> What went well?

> What can be improved?

> What was most meaningful for you?

> What questions were raised?

> What new ideas were generated?

> What feelings did you experience?

> How should the next session be planned? What role do you want to play?

> WHAT ACTIONS WILL YOU TAKE AS A RESULT OF THIS MEETING?

> WHAT ACTIONS SHOULD THE GROUP TAKE?

Note: The form on the following page may be photocopied for use with a group. Thank you to Richard Babb for permission to use the format feedback design.

EVALUATION

Date: _____

1. New Ideas I've Gotten:	3. Actions I'm Going To Take:
2. Questions that have been raised in my mind:	4. Feelings I've experienced:

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Suggested Reading on the Process:

Senge, Peter M. (1990). The Fifth Discipline. NY: Doubleday.

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477 Madison Avenue
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(212) 688-2063

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